

S E R M O N,

WRITTEN BY THE LATE

SAMUEL JOHNSON, L.L.D.

FOR THE

FUNERAL OF HIS WIFE.

PUBLISHED BY THE

Rev. SAMUEL HAYES, A.M.

USHER OF WESTMINSTER-SCHOOL.

L O N D O N :

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.

MDCCLXXXVIII.

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THE following SERMON (the Authenticity of which cannot be doubted) came, with many others, into the Hands of the Editor by the Death of Dr. TAYLOR, late Prebendary of WESTMINSTER, &c.

It is now published for two Reasons: First, as it is a Composition that will reflect no Disgrace on the Author; and, Secondly, as it is upon a Subject of the highest Importance to Mankind.

Great Dean's Yard, Westminster,
March 18th, 1788.

THE Following Sermon (the Authenticity
of which cannot be doubted) came, with many
others, into the Hands of the Editor by the
Dedication of / Dr. FARROW, late President of
WESTMINSTER, &c.

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Green Dragon Yard, Westminster,
March 18th 1798

LATELY PUBLISHED

(In Two Volumes, Price Twelve Shillings, Boards)

LETTERS to and from the late SAMUEL JOHNSON, L.L.D.—To which are added, some POEMS, never before printed.—Published from the original MSS. in his Possession.—By Hester Lynch FROST.

ANECDOTES of the late SAMUEL JOHNSON, L.L.D. during the last Twenty Years of his Life.—By Hester Lynch FROST.—Fourth Edition.

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand.

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A

S E R M O N, &c.

JOHN, Ch. XI. 25, 26 *o.* FORMER PART.

JESUS SAID UNTO HER, I AM THE RESURRECTION,
AND THE LIFE: HE THAT BELIEVETH IN ME,
THOUGH HE WERE DEAD, YET SHALL HE LIVE;

AND WHOSOEVER LIVETH, AND BELIEVETH IN ME,
SHALL NEVER DIE.

TO afford adequate consolations to the
last hour, to clear the gloomy passage
through the valley of the shadow of death,
and to ease that anxiety, to which beings,
prescient of their own dissolution, and con-
scious of their own danger, must be ne-
cessarily exposed, is the privilege only of re-
vealed religion. All those to whom the super-
natural light of heavenly doctrine has never
been imparted, however formidable for power,

or illustrious for wisdom, have wanted that knowledge of their future state, which alone can give comfort to misery, or security to enjoyment; and have been forced to rush forwards to the grave, through the darkness of ignorance; or, if they happened to be more refined and inquisitive, to solace their passage with the fallacious and uncertain glimmer of philosophy.

There were, doubtless, at all times, as there are now, many who lived with very little thought concerning their end; many whose time was wholly filled up by public, or domestic business, by the pursuits of ambition, or the desire of riches; many who dissolved themselves in luxurious enjoyments, and, when they could lull their minds by any present pleasure, had no regard to distant events, but withheld their imagination from sallying out into futurity, or catching any terror that might interrupt their quiet; and there were many who rose so little above animal life, that they were completely ingrossed by the objects about them, and had their views extended no farther than to the next hour; in whom the ray of reason was half extinct, and who had neither
 hopes

hopes nor fears, but of some near advantage, or some pressing danger.

But multitudes there must always be, and greater multitudes as arts and civility prevail, who cannot wholly withdraw their thoughts from death. All cannot be distracted with business, or stunned with the clamours of assemblies, or the shouts of armies. All cannot live in the perpetual dissipation of successive diversions, nor will all enslave their understandings to their senses, and seek felicity in the gross gratifications of appetite. Some must always keep their reason and their fancy in action, and seek either honour or pleasure from intellectual operations; and from them, others, more negligent or sluggish, will be in time fixed or awakened; knowledge will be perpetually diffused, and curiosity hourly enlarged.

But, when the faculties were once put in motion, when the mind had broken loose from the shackles of sense, and made excursions to remote consequences, the first consideration that would stop her course, must be the incessant waste of life, the approach of age, and

the certainty of death; the approach of that time, in which strength must fail, and pleasure fly away, and the certainty of that dissolution which shall put an end to all the prospects of this world. It is impossible to think, and not sometimes to think on death. Hope, indeed, has many powers of delusion; whatever is possible, however unlikely, it will teach us to promise ourselves; but death no man has escaped, and therefore no man can hope to escape it. From this dreadful expectation no shelter or refuge can be found. Whatever we see, forces it upon us; whatever is, new or old, flourishing or declining, either directly, or by a very short deduction, leads man to the consideration of his end; and accordingly we find, that the fear of death has always been considered as the great enemy of human quiet, the polluter of the feast of happiness, and embitterer of the cup of joy. The young man who rejoices in his youth, amidst his music and his gaiety, has always been disturbed with the thought, that his youth will be quickly at an end. The Monarch, to whom it is said that he is a God, has always been reminded by his own heart, that he shall die like man.

This

This unwelcome conviction, which is thus continually pressed upon the mind, every art has been employed to oppose. The general remedy, in all ages, has been to chase it away from the present moment, and to gain a suspension of the pain that could not be cured. In the ancient writings, we therefore find the shortness of life frequently mentioned as an excitement to jollity and pleasure; and may plainly discover, that the authors had no other means of relieving that gloom with which the uncertainty of human life clouded their conceptions. Some of the Philosophers, indeed, appear to have sought a nobler, and a more certain remedy, and to have endeavoured to overpower the force of death by arguments, and to dispel the gloom by the light of reason. They inquired into the nature of the soul of man, and shewed, at least probably, that it is a substance distinct from matter, and therefore independent on the body, and exempt from dissolution and corruption. The arguments, whether physical or moral, upon which they established this doctrine, it is not necessary to recount to a Christian audience, by whom it is believed upon more certain proofs, and higher authority; since, though they were such

as might determine the calm mind of a Philosopher, inquisitive only after truth, and uninfluenced by external objects; yet they were such as required leisure and capacity, not allowed in general to mankind; they were such as many could never understand, and of which, therefore, the efficacy and comfort were confined to a small number, without any benefit to the unenlightened multitude.

Such has been hitherto the nature of philosophical arguments, and such it must probably for ever remain; for, though, perhaps, the successive industry of the studious may increase the number, or advance the probability, of arguments; and, though continual contemplation of matter will, I believe, shew it, at length, wholly incapable of motion, sensation, or order, by any powers of its own, and therefore necessarily establish the immateriality, and probably the immortality of the soul; yet there never can be expected a time, in which the gross body of mankind can attend to such speculations, or can comprehend them; and therefore there never can be a time, in which this knowledge can be taught in such a manner, as to be generally conducive to virtue, or happiness,

piness, but by a messenger from God, from the Creator of the World, and the Father of Spirits.

To persuade common and uninstructed minds to the belief of any fact, we may every day perceive, that the testimony of one man, whom they think worthy of credit, has more force than the arguments of a thousand reasoners, even when the arguments are such as they may be imagined completely qualified to comprehend. Hence it is plain, that the constitution of mankind is such, that abstruse and intellectual truths can be taught no otherwise than by positive assertion, supported by some sensible evidence, by which the assertor is secured from the suspicion of falsehood; and that, if it should please God to inspire a teacher with some demonstration of the immortality of the soul, it would far less avail him for general instruction, than the power of working a miracle in its vindication, unless God should, at the same time, inspire all the hearers with docility and apprehension, and turn, at once, all the sensual, the giddy, the lazy, the busy, the corrupt and the proud, into humble, abstracted and diligent Philosophers.

To bring life and immortality to light, to give such proofs of our future existence, as may influence the most narrow mind, and fill the most capacious intellect, to open prospects beyond the grave, in which the thought may expatiate without obstruction, and to supply a refuge and support to the mind, amidst all the miseries of decaying nature, is the peculiar excellence of the Gospel of Christ. Without this heavenly Instructor, he who feels himself sinking under the weight of years, or melting away by the slow waste of a lingering disease, has no other remedy than obdurate patience, a gloomy resignation to that which cannot be avoided; and he who follows his friend, or whoever there is yet dearer than a friend, to the grave, can have no other consolation than that which he derives from the general misery; the reflection, that he suffers only what the rest of mankind must suffer; a poor consideration, which rather awes us to silence, than soothes us to quiet, and which does not abate the sense of our calamity, though it may sometimes make us ashamed to complain.

But, so much is our condition improved by the Gospel, so much is the sting of death rebated,

bated, that we may now be invited to the contemplation of our mortality, as to a pleasing employment of the mind, to an exercise delightful and recreative, not only when calamity and persecution drive us out from the assemblies of men, and sorrow and woe represent the grave as a refuge and an asylum, but even in the hours of the highest earthly prosperity, when our cup is full, and when we have laid up stores for ourselves; for, in him who believes the promise of the Saviour of the World, it can cause no disturbance to remember, that this night his soul may be required of him; and he who suffers one of the sharpest evils which this life can shew, amidst all its varieties of misery; he that has lately been separated from the person whom a long participation of good and evil had endeared to him; he who has seen kindness snatched from his arms, and fidelity torn from his bosom; he whose ear is no more to be delighted with tender instruction, and whose virtue shall be no more awakened by the seasonable whispers of mild reproof, may yet look, without horror, on the tomb which encloses the remains of what he loved and honoured, as upon a place which, if it revives the sense of his loss, may calm him
with

with the hope of that state in which there shall be no more grief or separation.

To Christians the celebration of a funeral is by no means a solemnity of barren and unavailing sorrow, but established by the church for other purposes.

First, for the consolation of sorrow. Secondly, for the enforcement of piety. The mournful solemnity of the burial of the dead is instituted, first, for the consolation of that grief to which the best minds, if not supported and regulated by religion, are most liable. They who most endeavour the happiness of others, who devote their thoughts to tenderness and pity, and studiously maintain the reciprocation of kindness, by degrees mingle their souls, in such a manner, as to feel, from separation, a total destitution of happiness, a sudden abruption of all their prospects, a cessation of all their hopes, schemes and desires. The whole mind becomes a gloomy vacuity, without any image or form of pleasure, a chaos of confused wishes, directed to no particular end, or to that which, while we wish, we cannot hope to obtain; for the dead will not revive; those
whom

whom God has called away from the present state of existence, can be seen no more in it; we must go to them; but they cannot return to us.

Yet, to shew that grief is vain, is to afford very little comfort; yet this is all that reason can afford; but religion, our only friend in the moment of distress, in the moment when the help of man is vain, when fortitude and cowardice sink down together, and the sage and the virgin mingle their lamentations; religion will inform us, that sorrow and complaint are not only vain, but unreasonable and erroneous. The voice of God, speaking by his Son, and his apostles, will instruct us, that she, whose departure we now mourn, is not dead, but sleepeth; that only her body is committed to the ground, but that the soul is returned to God, who gave it; that God, who is infinitely merciful, who hateth nothing that he has made, who desireth not the death of a sinner; to that God, who only can compare performance with ability, who alone knows how far the heart has been pure, or corrupted, how inadvertency has surpris'd, fear has betrayed, or weakness has impeded; to that

that God, who marks every aspiration after a better state, who hears the prayer which the voice cannot utter, records the purpose that perished without opportunity of action, the wish that vanished away without attainment, who is always ready to receive the penitent, to whom sincere contrition is never late, and who will accept the tears of a returning sinner.

Such are the reflections to which we are called by the voice of truth ; and from these we shall find that comfort which philosophy cannot supply, and that peace which the world cannot give. The contemplation of the mercy of God may justly afford some consolation, even when the office of burial is performed to those who have been snatched away without visible amendment of their lives ; for, who shall presume to determine the state of departed souls, to lay open what God hath concealed, and to search the counsels of the Most Highest ?—But, with more confident hope of pardon and acceptance, may we commit those to the receptacles of mortality, who have lived without any open or enormous crimes ; who have endeavoured to propitiate God by repentance,

pentance, and have died, at last, with hope and resignation. Among these she surely may be remembered whom we have followed hither to the tomb, to pay her the last honours, and to resign her to the grave: she, whom many who now hear me have known, and whom none, who were capable of distinguishing either moral or intellectual excellence, could know, without esteem, or tenderness. To praise the extent of her knowledge, the acuteness of her wit, the accuracy of her judgment, the force of her sentiments, or the elegance of her expression, would ill suit with the occasion.

Such praise would little profit the living, and as little gratify the dead, who is now in a place where vanity and competition are forgotten for ever; where she finds a cup of water given for the relief of a poor brother, a prayer uttered for the mercy of God to those whom she wanted power to relieve, a word of instruction to ignorance, a smile of comfort to misery, of more avail than all those accomplishments which confer honour and distinction among the sons of Folly.—Yet, let it be remembered, that her wit was never employed
to

to scoff at goodness, nor her reason to dispute against truth. In this age of wild opinions, she was as free from scepticism as the cloistered virgin. She never wished to signalize herself by the singularity of paradox. She had a just diffidence of her own reason, and desired to practise rather than to dispute. Her practice was such as her opinions naturally produced. She was exact and regular in her devotions, full of confidence in the divine mercy, submissive to the dispensations of Providence, extensively charitable in her judgments and opinions, grateful for every kindness that she received, and willing to impart assistance of every kind to all whom her little power enabled her to benefit. She passed through many months languor, weakness and decay, without a single murmur of impatience, and often expressed her adoration of that mercy which granted her so long time for recollection and penitence. That she had no failings, cannot be supposed: but she has now appeared before the Almighty Judge; and it would ill become beings like us, weak and sinful as herself, to remember those faults which, we trust, Eternal Purity has pardoned.

Let

Let us therefore preserve her memory for no other end but to imitate her virtues ; and let us add her example to the motives to piety which this solemnity was, secondly, instituted to enforce.

It would not indeed be reasonable to expect, did we not know the inattention and perverseness of mankind, that any one who had followed a funeral, could fail to return home without new resolutions of a holy life : for, who can see the final period of all human schemes and undertakings, without conviction of the vanity of all that terminates in the present state ? For, who can see the wise, the brave, the powerful, or the beauteous, carried to the grave, without reflection on the emptiness of all those distinctions which set us here in opposition to each other ? And who, when he sees the vanity of all terrestrial advantages, can forbear to wish for a more permanent and certain happiness ? Such wishes, perhaps, often arise, and such resolutions are often formed : but, before the resolution can be exerted, before the wish can regulate the conduct, new prospects open before us, new impressions are received ; the temp-

temptations of the world solicit, the passions of the heart are put into commotion ; we plunge again into the tumult, engage again in the contest, and forget, that what we gain cannot be kept, and that the life, for which we are thus busy to provide, must be quickly at an end.

But, let us not be thus shamefully deluded ! Let us not thus idly perish in our folly, by neglecting the loudest call of Providence ; nor, when we have followed our friends, and our enemies, to the tomb, suffer ourselves to be surprised by the dreadful summons, and die, at last, amazed and unprepared ! Let every one whose eye glances on this bier, examine what would have been his condition, if the same hour had called him to judgment, and remember, that, though he is now spared, he may, perhaps, be to-morrow among separate spirits. The present moment is in our power : let us, therefore, from the present moment, begin our repentance ! Let us not, any longer, harden our hearts, but hear, this day, the voice of our Saviour and our God, and begin to do, with all our powers, whatever we shall wish
to

to have done, when the grave shall open before us ! Let those who came hither weeping and lamenting, reflect, that they have not time for useless sorrow ; that their own salvation is to be secured, and that the day is far spent, and the night cometh, when no man can work ; that tears are of no value to the dead, and that their own danger may justly claim their whole attention ! Let those who entered this place unaffected and indifferent, and whose only purpose was to behold this funeral spectacle, consider, that she, whom they thus behold with negligence, and pass by, was lately partaker of the same nature with themselves ; and that they likewise are hastening to their end, and must soon, by others equally negligent, be buried and forgotten ! Let all remember, that the day of life is short, and that the day of grace may be much shorter ; that this may be the last warning which God will grant us, and that, perhaps, he who looks on this grave unalarmed, may sink unreformed into his own !

Let it, therefore, be our care, when we retire from this solemnity, that we immediately

turn from our wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right; that, whenever disease, or violence, shall dissolve our bodies, our souls may be saved alive, and received into everlasting habitations; where, with Angels and Archangels, and all the glorious Host of Heaven, they shall sing glory to God on high, and the Lamb, for ever and ever.

THE END.

